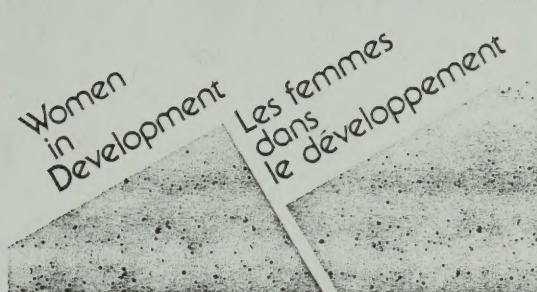


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WOMEN AND FORESTRY

OCTOBER 1985



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The Present Situation

Forests are essential to the ecological and economic well-being of people everywhere. They protect productive soil from erosion by wind and water. Forests provide people with plants and animals for nutrition. Many herbal medicines are based on forest products. Wood from forest trees is used for fuel and for construction material. Many industries are based on the exploitation of wood.

However, growing populations with a need to clear land for agriculture and with a commercial demand for wood in urban areas have put pressure on the Third World's forests for several decades. Countries have been forced to exploit their forests to earn foreign exchange revenues through the exportation of commercial timber.

The energy crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, combined with larger population growth, has put ever-increasing pressure on the world's poor to intensify the use of wood as household fuel, and families, particularly women and children, spend more time in the search for wood. As wood becomes scarce, animal dung and crop residues are diverted from fertilizing the fields. This deprives the soil of vital agricultural nutrients, and damages soil structure and fertility.

The overexploitation of forests leads to land degradation, deforestation, desertification, soil erosion, flooding and drying up of springs. With siltation of rivers, water-borne diseases flourish. The life-style of entire populations is threatened, and their knowledge of the medicinal values of plants is lost. It is estimated that 10 per cent of all plants (some 25,000 species) are endangered or near extinction due to the destruction of forests (1).

The deforestation issue often reveals a dichotomy between the interests of men and women. Collection of household fuel, fodder for domestic animals and food and water for the family is primarily women's work. By contrast, men are more likely to be employed in commercial forest exploitation activities, and therefore they tend to be more interested in planting saleable trees.

Women are often responsible for forest nursery and plantation work, but for the most part they are excluded from forest management and surveying, logging, forest protection and control tasks. Discrimination against women workers in terms of pay is quite common. (2)

Past Achievements

'Rural forestry' is a concept that describes a wide range of activities which vary among countries and are usually based on public or communal land designated for tree growing to meet community needs, or on small private farms to meet subsistence requirements. For example, in the Indian state of

Gujarat, village woodlots are used to produce wood for fuel, fodder and building materials. In Senegal, Costa Rica and Thailand, local interest groups intercrop plant varieties of shrubs, fruitbearing trees and trees used mainly for wood. Trees are planted together with grasses to stabilize fragile parts on mountain sides in Nepal, Peru and Haiti (3). In most of these projects, women play a particularly important role in the maintenance and care of newly planted trees. In some instances, they have been included in project planning and design. They were vital for the success of programs. For example, tree planning projects that make new time and financial demands on women are more likely to receive priority if women are consulted before the implementation of the projects, and if women's work overload can be eased by the introduction of appropriate technology.

It has not always been easy for women to get their point of view across to project planners and implementers. The women of the State of Uttar Pradesh in India, for example, spontaneously rose up against a timber contractor who tried to fell the community's trees for a sporting goods factory. In the Indian village of Dungari-Paitli, women protested against their own husbands and sons who had sold community forest land to the Government's horticulture department for a potato seed farm (4).

A number of grassroots ecological movements have been very successful in influencing forestry management policy. In Northern India, for example, in the Chipko Andolan movement, women were hugging the trees to prevent cutting. They were protesting the overall impact of the policy which was leading to land degradation in the Himalayan foothills.

Barriers to Women's Participation in Forestry Policy Making

Deforestation is linked to a change in the traditional production patterns in agriculture and industry. The modernization of industry and the introduction of new industries are often carried out without consulting those who are most affected by the changes. Women, especially in the rural areas, often work in small-scale industries which depend on fuelwood. In Tanzania, for example, women operate brewing and fish-smoking enterprises. These industries are threatened due to changes in agricultural production patterns. And in South India, the destruction of bamboo forests by paper mills resulted in falling income and considerable hardship for local basket weavers (5).

The failure to recognize women's contribution to or involvement in the forestry sector can be partly explained by official statistics tending to concentrate on the areas of wage labour or commercial production where women are under-represented. Data on women's contribution to the informal sector is sparse. Likewise, women are often under-represented in policy-making and in technical training programs.


Future Action

- * Women need to be educated for forest management and planning tasks. They need to be involved in making decisions about changes in the use of local wood supply.

- * Rural forestry projects have to deal with the issues of land use, local politics, patterns of community cooperation and gender division of labour. An integrated approach to the conservation of forests must be adopted.
- * Strip-mining, a practice whereby the earth is removed layer by layer, destroys forests. Forests that are not renewable are lost to future generations. Strip-mining should be discontinued.
- * Rational management and conservation of forest resources could halt the depletion of one of the world's most vital resources.
- * Rural women in the Third World will be needed in the design and planning of forestry programs, and must become part of the decision-making structure when industrial and agricultural development plans are adopted.

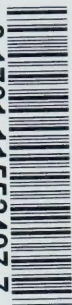
Footnotes

1. Noted in a CBC commentary.
2. United Nations System and the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, United Nations World Conference of the International Women's Year, Conference Paper E/COBF.66/Add.1, 6 June 1975, p.22, paragraph 26.
- 3.. Farm and Community Forestry, Gerald Foley and Geoffrey Barnard, Earthscan Technical Report No.3, August 1984.
4. "Chipko: North India's Tree Huggers", Mark Sheppard, Coevolution Quarterly, Fall 1981, 'The Greening of the Himalayas' B.B. Juyal, Anticipation No. 28, World Council of Churches, Boston, USA.
5. The State of India's Environment 1982: A Citizen's Report, Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi, 1982.



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